

## LESSON 5: TEST TAKING TECHNIQUES



*allocate*  
*compare*  
*contrast*  
*criticize*  
*enumerate*  
*inference*  
*interpret*  
*justify*  
*prove*

### INTRODUCTION

Two essentials for test taking are knowledge and attitude. You are in control of these two essential factors.

**Knowledge** — You are prepared. As an active learner, you are most likely knowledgeable about the topics on which you will be tested. You are studying all the time to gain that knowledge about the changing topics as you advance in your studies.

**Attitude** — You are calm and cool. Your attitude can help you do well on a test. Work on your attitude before going into the test.

You also need knowledge about another area — test-taking techniques. Once you are knowledgeable about these techniques, you don't have to study them again.

Test taking techniques include:

- Having a strategy for taking the entire test.
- Recognizing characteristics of specific question types and directions.

You know the material or you don't. Being nervous won't improve your performance. Being nervous can cause you to forget the material and lower your grade. When you are tense and anxious, you drain energy away from your test performance. Tell yourself that you will do well. Repeat positive statements to yourself.

Some sample positive statements follow:

- I can keep my cool because I studied. I'll put that information together in inspired new ways that help me shine.
- Tests are challenges, but I can do it.
- I can keep calm and think logically.
- I planned my work so I didn't have to cram.
- I'll stay calm and let my memory work.
- I think extremely well during tests.

### PREPARING FOR TESTS

The best preparation for taking tests is to keep up with assignments. Complete all study assignments when they are assigned, take notes in class and while studying. Keep a copy of all previous study materials and all graded work.

Review your class notes each day. At the end of each week, review all reading assignments.

The old expression — “*a picture is worth a thousand words*” — means that visual pictures impress the memory better than verbal thoughts. For example, students who routinely visualize what they read in books perform better on tests.

When a test is announced or anticipated, identify the material that will be covered in a test. For best test taking results, you should create a study plan for yourself. Determine what review material you have and how much time you have to study for the test and make a schedule for yourself. Divide the study material into small, easily completed chunks. For instance, during one study period, review your class notes. In the next study session, review your homework.

Dividing your study time can help you overcome any fears you may be experiencing. Familiarize yourself with test question styles and directions. Keep calm and cool; think positively. And, **allocate** your time carefully.

On the day of the test, follow these tips to help you achieve your best results.

- Arrive early.
- Take your seat and breath deeply.
- Let go of negative feelings about the test.
- Pace the test by looking over the entire test and allotting your time, or look over as much of the test as you are allowed to see at one time.
- Read the test directions slowly and carefully before you answer the first question. Reread the directions if necessary.
- Pick the parts of the test that you know and do those first. Answer the easiest questions first. Don't spend a lot of time on the questions you need to figure out.
- Keep an eye on the time. Assess how much time you have to finish unanswered questions.
- Look for answers to the hard questions in other parts of the test.
- When you are unsure of the correct answer, try to eliminate the obvious wrong choices.
- Review your test answers before you turn them in.

## TAKING THE TEST

Tests are comprised of two main components: the directions or directives, and the test questions. You just learned that you should review the test directions to help you answer questions correctly, and that you should answer the easiest questions first. The following material will introduce you to several different question directives, followed by some helpful information regarding test question formats.

### DIRECTIVES

The following is a list of test directives and definitions. Test directives tell you how to answer questions.

- **Compare** — Examine qualities or characteristics to discover resemblances. “Compare” is usually stated as “compare with.” You are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned.
- **Contrast** — Stress dissimilarities or differences of things, qualities, events, or problems.
- **Criticize** — Express your judgment on correctness or merit. Discuss the limitations and good points or contributions of the plan or work in question.
- **Define** — Definitions call for concise, clear meanings. You must keep in mind the class to which a thing belongs and whatever differentiates the particular object from all others in the class.

- **Describe** — In a descriptive answer, you should recount, characterize, sketch, or relate in narrative form.
- **Diagram** — If you are asked to diagram, you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation in your answer. Generally, you are expected to label the diagram and in some cases add a brief explanation or description.
- **Discuss** — This word directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations both for and against the problem or topic involved. This type of question calls for a complete and detailed answer. As you discuss, you may compare, contrast, define, and describe.
- **Enumerate** — This word specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions, recount one by one the points required.
- **Evaluate** — This word specifies a careful appraisal of the problem, stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations.
- **Explain** — In explanatory answers, you must clarify and interpret the material you present. In such an answer, state “how or why,” reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. Make plain the conditions that laid the foundation for the topic.
- **Illustrate** — This word requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, picture, or concrete example.
- **Inference** — When asked to infer, you are required to make a determination of a given problem based on the proposition, statement, or judgment considered as true within another problem.
- **Interpret** — An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgment or reaction to the problem.
- **Justify** — When you are instructed to justify your answer, you must **prove** or show your grounds for decisions. In such an answer, present evidence in a convincing form.
- **List** — To list is to enumerate. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or tabulation. Such answers should always be given in concise form.
- **Outline** — An outline answer is organized description. Give the main points and essential details. Omit minor details. Present the information in a systematic arrangement.
- **Prove** — A question that requires proof is one that demands confirmation or verification. Establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing evidence or by logical reasoning.
- **Relate** — If you are asked to relate or show the relationship, emphasize the connections and associations in descriptive form.
- **Review** — A review specifies a critical examination. Analyze and comment briefly in an organized sequence upon the major points of the problem.
- **State** — In questions directing you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear narrative form. Omit details and illustrations or examples.
- **Summarize** — To summarize, give in condensed form the main points or facts

of the problem or topic. Omit all details, illustrations, and elaboration.

- **Trace** — To trace, give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin. Such narratives may call for probing or deduction.

### ***QUESTION FORMATS***

Tests are used to determine how much you know about a given subject. The questions are used to elicit response and come in many forms. Typically, questions can be objective or subjective in nature. Objective questions, such as multiple-choice and binary-choice test your ability to recall, compare, or contrast information and to choose the right answer among several choices. The subjective question, such as an essay question, demands the same information recall, but asks that you use critical-thinking strategies to answer the question, then organize, write, and revise a written response.

This lesson covers five question formats:

- Multiple-choice
- Binary-choice
- Short answer
- Essay
- Reading Comprehension.

Each question format is described with tips for answering the question format.

#### ***Multiple-Choice***

Multiple-choice questions are the most popular format. Typically, you are given four possible answer choices and are asked to select the best answer, or most appropriate response.

Read the question carefully and determine if you are to select one correct response or select several correct responses.

An answer choice of “All of the above” is typically the correct answer. If more than one choice is correct, “all of the above” is probably correct as well.

If you don’t know the answer immediately, try to eliminate obviously incorrect answer choices. Also, you can check to see if any other question has the answer to your question or a clue as to the correct response.

#### ***Binary-Choice***

Binary-choice questions are really multiple-choice questions with only two choices. Typical answer choices for this question format are the True/False, Yes/No, and Agree/Disagree.

Pay attention to qualifiers and negatives. Qualifiers like “never,” “always,” “none,” and “only” usually indicate a false statement. They require the question statement be 100 percent correct to be true. Qualifiers like “sometimes,” “often,” “generally,” and “frequently” usually indicate a true statement.

Negative words such as “can’t” and “no” can be confusing. Try to evaluate the statement without the negative word.

#### ***Short Answer***

Short answer or fill-in-the-blank questions require you to know (recall) the answer whereas binary-choice and multiple-choice questions test your ability to recognize (select the correct choice amongst several possible choices).

Look for grammatical clues within the question to help you determine the correct answer. If you can think of several correct answers, let your teacher know and you may be rewarded with a clue as to the answer he or she is looking for.

### ***Essay***

Remember that the essay question is a subjective question that demands information recall, and also asks that you use critical-thinking strategies to answer the question, then organize, write, and revise a written response.

Start by identifying how much time you can devote to answering the question. Jot down key words or ideas so you can retrieve them later when writing your essay.

Begin with a strong sentence that clearly states your essay's main theme. Follow that with the key points that you will discuss. Expand upon your key points by writing a paragraph for each point.

### ***Reading Comprehension***

In reading comprehension questions, you read a short paragraph and answer questions about it. Comprehension is especially critical during test taking. You must read and interpret correctly the test directions, the questions, and the answers. Questions can relate to the reading's main theme. Questions may also ask for general or specific information about the reading material.

You will find it helpful to read the questions before you read the text.

## **CONCLUSION**

Remember to divide your study time; keep calm and cool; and think positively.

By understanding test taking techniques, keeping a positive attitude, overcoming your fears, and following the tips for answering different questions formats found in this lesson, you will improve your test-taking ability.